

The Reformers and the People.

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the drivers of donkeys/' wrote he in 1526, "who have to belabour their animals incessantly with rods and whips, so must the rulers do with Herr Omnes (the people). They must drive, beat, throttle, hang, burn, behead, and torture, in order to make themselves feared and keep the people in check." The people in the regions under Luther's influence became or remained Lutherans, because the "Obrigkeit" took Luther's side, and they must perforce profess the religion of their prince. Lutheranism became a religion of subordination, political nullity for "the common man." It indeed planted schools and cared for the poor, but it was no large gospel of progress such as the lower classes thirsted for, and under it they remained in serfish dependence for two hundred and fifty years to come. On the other hand, it contributed materially to strengthen the *regime* of the absolute potentate, whether elector, duke, or margrave. Luther, Melancthon, Spalatin, and other reforming doctors, swam with the political current which was bearing the absolute ruler to port alike in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. They defended the doctrine of the divine right of the few as dogmatically as they inculcated the divine law of submission for the many. They dethroned the pope; they set up the absolute king, against whom rebellion is crime. Passive resistance might be permissible in matters of conscience, in cases more especially of antagonism to the Lutheran theology. The Christian subject may not deny God at the prince's command, but he may not actively resist. Even this modicum of opposition was swept away by Martin Bucer, who insisted that subjects must obey commands even when contrary to the word of God. For this extreme concession he sought compensation by demanding that all professors of a false religion, presumably Roman Catholics and dissenters from Lutheranism, should be exterminated by fire and sword. Even women and children, yea, the very cattle of these false professors, might lawfully be destroyed.

Political and social progress was stifled in Germany for two hundred and fifty years to come. The Anabaptist attempt to found, at Miinster, the kingdom of God on earth once more was a mere after-bubble of the ultra-religious element of the Peasant Rising. Its extravagance, which outdid the fanaticism of Miinzer, never allowed it to rise above the level of social and